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AFTER TOMORROW

BY THE AUTHOR OF
"THE GREEN CARNATION"



MERRIAM'S
VIOLET
SERIES





"COME BACK," SHE SAID." *Page 43.*

AFTER TO-MORROW

BY
THE AUTHOR OF
"THE GREEN CARNATION"

ILLUSTRATED



NEW YORK
THE MERRIAM COMPANY
67 FIFTH AVENUE

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67 FIFTH AVENUE

NEW YORK

AFTER TO-MORROW.

CHAPTER I.

IN his gilded cage, that hung between pale-green curtains over the window-boxes that were full of white daisies, the canary chirped with a desultory vivacity. That was the only near sound that broke the silence in the drawing-room of No. 100 Mill Street, Knightsbridge, in which a man and woman stood facing one another. Away beyond this twittering voice sang in the London streets the muffled voice of the season. The time was late

afternoon, and rays of mellow light slanted into the pretty room, and touched its crowd of inanimate occupants with a radiance in which the motes danced merrily. The china faces of two goblins on the mantelpiece glowed with a grotesque meaning, and their yellow smiles seemed to call aloud on mirth; but the faces of the man and woman were pale, and their lips trembled and did not smile.

She was tall, dark, and passionate-looking, perhaps twenty-eight or thirty. He was a few years older, a man so steadfast in expression that silly people, who spring at exaggeration as saints spring at heaven, called him stern, and even said he looked forbidding—at balls.

At last the song of the canary was broken upon by a voice. Sir Hugh Blake spoke very quietly. "Why not?" he said.

"I don't think I can tell you," Mrs. Blair answered, with an obvious effort.

"You prefer to refuse me without giving a reason?"

"I have a right to," she said.

"I don't question it. You cannot expect me to say more than that."

He took up his hat, which lay on a chair, and smoothed it mechanically with his coat-sleeve. The action seemed to pierce her like a knife, for she started and half extended her hand. "Don't!" she exclaimed. "At least wait one moment. So you belong to the second class of men?"

"What do you mean?"

"Men are divided into two classes—those who refuse to be refused, and those who accept. But don't be too—too swift in your acceptance. After all, a refusal is not exactly a bank-note."

She tried to smile.

"But I am exactly a beggar," he answered, still keeping the hat in his hand. "And if you have nothing to give me, I may as well go."

"And spend the rest of your life in sweeping the old crossing?"

"And spend the rest of my life as I can," he said. "That need not concern you."

"A woman must be all to a man or nothing?"

"You must be all to me or nothing."

She sat down in an armchair in that part of the room that was in shadow. She always sat instinctively in shadow when she wanted to think.

"Well?" Sir Hugh said. "What are you thinking?"

She glanced up at him. "That you don't look much like a beggar," she said.

"It is possible to feel tattered in a frock-coat and patent leather boots," he answered. "Good-by. I am going back to my crossing." And he moved toward the door.

"No, stop!" she exclaimed. "Before you go, tell me one thing."

"What is it?"

"Will you ever ask me to marry you again?"

He looked hard into her eyes. "I

shall always want to, but I shall never do it," he said slowly.

"I am glad you have told me that. We women depend so much on a repetition of the offence when we blame a man for saying he loves us, and ask him not to do it again. If you really mean only to propose once, I must reconsider my position."

She was laughing, but the tears stood in her eyes.

"Why do you want to make this moment a farcical one?" he asked rather bitterly.

"Oh, Hugh!" she answered, "don't you see? Because it is really—really so tragic. I only try to do for this moment what we all try to do for life."

"Then you love me?" he said, moving a step forward.

"I never denied that," she replied. "I might as well deny that I am a woman."

He held out his arms. "Eve—then I shall never go back to the crossing."

But she drew back. "Go—go there till to-morrow! To-morrow afternoon I will see you; and if you love me after that——"

"Yes?"

She turned away and pressed the bell. "Good-by," she said. Her voice sounded strange to him.

He came nearer and touched her hand, but she drew it away.

"You may kiss me," she said.

"Eve!"

"After to-morrow."

The footman came in answer to the bell. Mrs. Blair did not turn round.

"I only rang for you to open the door for Sir Hugh," she said, "Good-by then, Sir Hugh. Come at five."

"I will," he answered, wondering.

When he had gone, Mrs. Blair sat down in a chair and took up a French novel. It was by Gyp. She tried to read it, with tears running over her cheeks. But at last she laid it down.

"After to-morrow," she murmured. "Ah, why—why does a woman ever love twice?" And then she sobbed.

But the canary sang, and the motes danced merrily in the sunbeams. And on the table where she had put it down lay *Le Mariage de Chiffon*.

CHAPTER II.

THAT evening when Sir Hugh Blake came back to his rooms in Jermym Street after dining out, he found a large man sprawling in one of his saddle-backed chairs, puffing vigorously at a pipe that looked worn with long and faithful service. The man took the pipe out of his mouth and sprang up.

"Hullo, Blake!" he cried. "D'you recognize the tobacco an' me?"

Hugh grasped his hand warmly. "Rather," he said. "Neither is changed. At least—h'm—I think you both seem a bit stronger even than usual. Who would have thought of seeing you,

Manning? I did not know you were in Europe."

"I come from Asia. I thought I should like to hear Calvé before the end of the season. And it was getting sultry out there. So here I am."

"And were those your only reasons?"

"Give me a brandy and soda," said the other.

Blake did as he was bid, lit a cigar, and sat down, stretching out his long legs. The other man took a pull at his glass, and spoke again.

"I am very fond of music," he said; "and Calvé sings very well!"

"Ah!"

"Look here, Blake," Manning broke out suddenly, "you are right—I had another reason. Kipling says that those

who have heard the East a-calling never heed any other voice. He's wrong, though. The West has been calling me, or at least a voice in the West, and I have resisted it for a deuce of a time. But at last it became imperative."

"A woman's voice, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Tell me what is its *timbre*, if you care to."

"I will. You're an old friend, and I can talk to you. But you tell me one thing first: Is a man really a fool to marry a woman with a past?"

"You are going to?"

"I have tried not to. I have been trying not to for three years. Listen! When I was travelling in Japan I met

her. She was with an American called Blair."

"What!"

"You knew him?"

"No! It's all right. I was surprised, because at the moment I was thinking of that very name."

"Oh! Well, she passed as Mrs. Blair; but, somehow, it got out that she was something else. The usual story, you know. People fought shy of her; but I don't think she cared much. Blair was devoted to her, and she loved him, and was as true to him as any wife could have been. Then the tragedy came."

"What was it?"

"Blair died suddenly in Tokio of typhoid. She nursed him to the end.



"TO-DAY I ASKED MRS. BLAIR TO MARRY ME."

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And when the end came her situation was awful, so lonely and deserted. There wasn't a woman in the hotel who would be her friend; so I tried to come to the rescue, arranged her affairs, saw about the funeral, and did what I could. She was well off; Blair left her nearly all his money. He would have married her, only he had a wife alive somewhere."

"And you fell in love with her, of course?"

"That was the sort of thing. If you knew her, you would not wonder at it. She was not a bad woman. Blair had been the only one. She loved him too much; that was all. She came to Europe and lived in Paris for a time, keeping the name of Mrs. Blair. I used to

see her sometimes, but I never said anything. You see, there was her past. In fact, I have been fighting against her for three years. I went to India to get cured, but it was no good. And now, here I am."

"And she is in Paris?"

"No, in London at present; but I didn't know her address till to-day. I think she had her doubts of me, and meant to give me the slip."

"How did you find it out?"

"Quite by chance. I was walking in Mill Street, Knightsbridge, and saw her pass in a victoria."

Blake got up suddenly and went over to the spirit-stand. "In Mill Street?" he said.

"Yes. The carriage stopped at No.

100. She went in. A footman came out and carried in her rug. *Ergo*, she lives there."

"How hot it is!" said Blake in a hard voice. He threw up one of the windows and leaned out. He felt as if he were choking. A little way down the street a half-tipsy Guardsman was reeling along, singing his own private version of "Tommy Atkins." He narrowly avoided a lamp-post by an abrupt lurch, which took him into the gutter. Blake heard some one laugh. It was himself.

"Well, old chap," said Manning, who had come up behind him, "what would you advise me to do? I'm in a fix. I'm in love with Eve—that's her name. I can't live without her happily, and yet

I hate to marry a woman with a—well, you know how it is.”

Blake drew himself back into the room and faced round. “Does she love you?” he asked, and there was a curious change in his manner toward his friend.

“I don’t know that she does,” Manning said, rather uncomfortably. “But that would come right. She would marry me, naturally.”

“Why?”

“Well, I mean the position. Lady Herbert Manning could go where Mrs. Blair could not, and all that sort of thing.”

“The only question is whether you can bring yourself to ask her?”

“My dear chap, you don’t put it too pleasantly.”

"It's the fact, though."

Lord Herbert hesitated. Then he said dubiously, "I suppose so."

Blake lit another cigar and sat down again. His face was very white. "You're rather conventional, Manning," he said presently.

"Conventional! Why?"

"You think her—this Mrs. Blair—a good woman. Isn't that enough for you?"

"But, besides Eve and myself, there is a third person in the situation."

"How on earth did you find out that?" exclaimed Blake.

The other looked surprised. "How did I find out? I don't understand you."

Blake recollected himself. He had made the common mistake of fancying

another might know a thing because he knew it.

"Who is this third person?" he said.

"Society."

"Ah! I said you were conventional."

"Every sensible man and woman is."

"I don't know that I agree. But the third person does certainly complicate the situation. What are you going to do, then?"

Lord Herbert put down his pipe. It was not smoked out. "That's what I want to know," he answered.

"Of course there's the one way—of being unconventional. Then there's the way of being conventional but unhappy. Is there any alternative?"

Lord Herbert hesitated obviously, but at length he said: "There is, of

course; but Mrs. Blair is a curious sort of woman. I don't quite know——"

He paused, looking at his friend. Blake's face was drawn and fierce.

"What's the row?" Lord Herbert asked.

"Nothing; only I shouldn't advise you to try the alternative. That's all."

"Blake, what do you mean?"

"Just this," replied the other, "that I know Mrs. Blair; that I agree with you about her character——"

"You know her? That's odd!"

"I have known her for a year."

They looked each other in the eyes while a minute passed. Then Lord Herbert said slowly, "I understand."

"What?"

“That I have come to the wrong man for advice.”

There was a silence, broken only by the ticking of a clock and the uneasy movements of Blake's fox-terrier, which was lying before the empty grate and dreaming of departed fires.

At last Blake said: “To-day I asked Mrs. Blair to marry me.”

The other started perceptibly. “Knowing what I have told you?” he asked.

“Not knowing it.”

“What—did she say?”

“Nothing. I am to see her to-morrow.”

Lord Herbert glanced at him furtively. “I suppose you will not go—now?” he said.

"Yes, Manning, I shall," Blake answered.

"Well," the other man continued, looking at his watch and yawning, "I must be going. It's late. Glad to have seen you, Blake. I am to be found at 4 St. James's Place. Thanks; yes, I will have my coat on. My pipe—oh! here it is. Good-night."

The door closed, and Blake was left alone.

"Will she tell me to-morrow, or will she be silent?" he said to himself. "That depends on one thing: Has love of truth the largest half of her heart, or love of me?"

He sighed—at the conventionality of the world perhaps.

CHAPTER III.

"I AM not at home to any one except Sir Hugh Blake," Mrs. Blair said to the footman. "You understand?"

"Yes, ma'am."

He went out softly and closed the door.

The English summer had gone back upon its steps that afternoon and remembered the duty it owed to its old-time reputation. The canary, a puffed-out ball of ragged-looking feathers in its cage, seemed listening with a depressed attention to the beat of the cold rain against the window. The daisies, in their boxes, dripped and

nodded in the wind. There was a darkness in the pretty room, and the smile of the china goblins was no longer yellow. Like many people who are not made of china, they depended upon adventitious circumstances for much of their outward show. When they were not gilded there was a good deal of the pill apparent in their nature.

Mrs. Blair was trying not to be restless. She was very pale and her dark eyes gleamed with an almost tragic fire, but she sat down firmly on the white sofa and read Gyp, as Carmen may have read her doom in the cards. One by one the pages were turned. One by one the epigrams were made the property of another mind. But through all the lightness and humor of the story

there crept like a little snake a sentence that Gyp had not written.

“Can I tell him?”

And no answer came to that question. When the doorbell at last rang, Mrs. Blair laid down her novel carefully, and mechanically stood up. A change of attitude was necessary to her.

Sir Hugh came in, and was followed by tea. They sat down by the tiny table and discussed French literature. Flaubert and Daudet go as well with tea as Fielding and Smollett go with supper. Somehow François Coppée was not mentioned. Neither Mrs. Blair nor Sir Hugh ever took sugar with their tea.

But, when the cups were put down, the latter drove the French authors in a pack out of the conversation.

"I did not come here to say what I can say to every woman I meet who understands French," he remarked.

And then Mrs. Blair was fully face to face with her particular guardian devil.

"No?" she said.

She did not try to postpone the moment she dreaded, for she had a strong man to deal with; and being a strong woman at heart, she generally held out her hand to the inevitable.

"You have been thinking?" Blake went on.

"Yes. What a sad occupation that is sometimes—like knitting or listening to church-bells at night!"

"Eve, let us be serious."

"God knows I am," she answered.

"But modern gravity is dressed in flippancy. No feeling must go quite naked."

"Don't talk like that," he said. "As there is a nudity in art that may be beautiful, so there is a nudity in expression, in words, that may be beautiful. Eve, I have come to hear you tell me something. You know that." He glanced into her face with an anxiety that she did not fully understand. Then he said:

"Tell it me."

"There is—is so much to tell," she said.

"Yes, yes."

"He does not understand," she thought.

He thought, "She does not understand."



THEY SAT DOWN BY THE TINY TABLE. *Page 37*

"And I am not good at telling stories."

"Then tell me the truth."

She tried to smile, but she was trembling. "Of course. Why should I not?" She hesitated, and then added, with a forced attempt at petulance: "But there is nothing so awkward as giving people more than they expect. Is there?"

He understood her question despite its apparent inconsequence, and his heart quickened its beating: "Give me everything."

"I suppose I should be doing that if I gave you myself," she said nervously.

"You know best," he answered; and for a moment she was puzzled by not catching the affirmative for which she had angled.

“Do you want me very, very much?” she asked.

“So much that, as I told you yesterday, I could not ask for you twice. Don’t you understand?”

“Yes. I could not marry a man who had bothered me to be his wife. One might as well be scolded into virtue. You want me, then, Hugh, and I want you. But——”

Again she stopped, with sentences fluttering, as it seemed, on the very edges of her lips. Her heart was at such fearful odds with her conscience that she felt as if he must hear the clashing of the swords. And he did hear it. He would fain have cheered on both the combatants. Which did he wish should be the conqueror? He hardly knew.

"Yes?" he said.

"It is always so difficult to finish a sentence that begins with 'but'," she began; and for the first time her voice sounded tremulous. "When two people want each other very much, there is always something that ought to keep them apart—at least, I think so. God must love solitude; it is His gift to so many." There were tears in her eyes.

"Why should we keep apart, Eve?"

"Because we should be too happy together, I suppose."

He leaned suddenly forward and took both her hands in his. "How cold you are!" he said, startled.

The words seemed to brace her like a sea-breeze.

"Hugh," she said, "I wish to tell you

something. There is a 'but' in the sentence of my life."

He drew her closer to him, with a strange impulse to be nearer the soul that was about to prove itself as noble as he desired. But that very act prevented the fulfilment of his wish. The touch of his hands, the eagerness of his eyes, gave the victory to her heart. She shut the lips that were speaking, and he kissed them. Kisses act as an opiate on a woman's conscience. Only when Eve felt his lips on hers did she know her own weakness. Sir Hugh, having kissed her, waited for the telling of the secret. At that moment he might as well have sat down and waited for the millennium.

"What is it?" he said at last.

"Nothing," she answered, "nothing." She spoke the word with a hard intonation.

Hugh held her close in his arms, with a sort of strange idea that to do so would crush his disappointment. She was proving her love by her silence. Why, then, did he wish that she should speak? At last she said, in a low voice:

"There is one thing you ought to know. If I marry you, I marry you a beggar. I shall lose my fortune. I am not obliged to lose it, but I mean to give it up. Don't ask me why."

He had no need to. He waited, but she was silent. So that was all. He kissed her again, loosened his arms from about her, and stood up.

"I have enough for both," he said.

He did not look at her, and she could not look at him.

"Are you going?" she said.

"Yes; but I will call this evening."

He was at the door, and had half-opened it when he turned back, moved by a passionate impulse.

"Eve!" he cried, and his eyes seemed asking her for something.

"Yes?" she said, looking away.

There was a silence. Then he said "Good-by!" The door closed upon him.

Mrs. Blair stood for a moment where he had left her. In her mind she was counting the seconds that must elapse before he could reach the street. If she could be untrue to herself till then, she could be untrue to herself forever. Would he walk down the stairs slowly

or fast? She wanted to be a false woman so much, so very much, that she clinched her hands together. The action seemed as if it might help her to keep on doing wrong. But suddenly she unclasped her hands, darted across the room to the door, and opened it. She listened, and heard Hugh's footsteps in the hall. He picked up his umbrella, and unfolded it to be ready for the rain. The *frou-frou* of the silk seemed to stir her to action.

"Hugh!" she cried in a broken voice.

He turned in the hall, and looked up.

"Come back," she said.

He came up the stairs three steps at a time.

"Hugh," she said, leaning heavily on the balustrade, and looking away, "I

have a secret to tell you. I have tried to be wicked to-day, but somehow I can't. Listen to the truth."

"I need not," he answered. "I know it already."

Then she looked at him, and drew in her breath: "You know it?"

"Yes."

"How you must love me!"

.

There was a ring at the hall-door. The footman opened it, held a short parley with some one who was invisible, shut the door, and came upstairs with a card.

Mrs. Blair took it, and read, "Lord Herbert Manning."

He had decided to be unconventional too late.



"THIS MAY BE NEW, BUT IT IS NOT LOVE."

Page 65.

THE NEW LOVE.

BY

The Author of "The Green Carnation."

CHARACTERS.

MRS. DELANE, a young widow, age 28.

MISS ENDSLEIGH, her friend, age 42.

ANDREW LEITH, Mrs. Delane's lover, age 30.

SCENE I.

Drawing-room in Mrs. Delane's house, No. 100 Jack Street, Mayfair.
Time: four o'clock on a winter's afternoon. Mrs. Delane and Miss Endsleigh.

Mrs. D.—You don't seem to have

progressed very much since we last met, Catherine, but I suppose one doesn't catch cold if one stands still in the country. Now, in London it is different. To be stationary in the midst of movement would be to show a revolutionary spirit, wouldn't it?

Miss E.—I rather like standing still, Maud. One can see the view so much better when one does it.

Mrs. D.—I prefer doing things to looking at other people doing them. The philosopher who peered through a microscope at the insects tearing each other to pieces in a drop of water must have been a fearful fossil. Believe me, lookers-on see least of the game.

Miss E.—I like looking on at the game of your life, dear, and I see a

great many of the moves. When I am not with you I see them in your letters. You are a good correspondent. You tell me such a lot by omission.

Mrs. D.—By omission?

Miss E.—Yes. You leave out so much that there is. Most women put in so much that there isn't.

Mrs. D.—Do you think that I have left out anything about—about Mr. Leith?

Miss E.—Everything almost; but so judiciously that I know all about him. He has a black mustache, for instance.

Mrs. D.—How did you find that out?

Miss E.—By your telling me, when you were pretending you did not love him, that you liked a man to have a mustache either blond, brown, or

gray. You left out black. Therefore, his is black.

Mrs. D.—Pretending I did not love him!

Miss E.—Well, it was a pretence. You are going to marry him, I suppose?

Mrs. D.—If he asks me.

Miss E.—I thought he was coming this afternoon on purpose?

Mrs. D.—He is coming; but it seems absurd to speak of his doing anything on purpose. He is very modern, you know, Catherine; and the new love is not the same as the old, although you seem to fancy so.

Miss E.—What is the difference between them?

Mrs. D.—I don't know much about the old love, but I believe it was very

definite. I judge so from middle-aged romances and gray-haired novels that I read from time to time. People said, "I worship you, Miss or Mrs. So-and-so," and proceeded to state the amount of their income. Men don't state the amount of their income now.

Miss E.—Often because they have no income.

Mrs. D.—And they don't say, "I worship you!"

Miss E.—Often because they have no soul.

Mrs. D.—Mr. Leith has an income.

Miss E.—Has he a soul?

Mrs. D.—I never asked him. He appreciates Pierre Loti—and me; so our tastes are similar.

Miss E.—And is he indefinite?

Mrs. D.—Very. So am I.

Miss E.—I am not.

Mrs. D.—No, dear, because you are old-fashioned. I dare to say that because I know you will take it as a compliment. Now, this afternoon Mr. Leith is coming here to ask me to marry him, and I am going to be at home in order to say yes. That sounds definite enough. But modern art concerns itself with treatment, not with subject. And the modern art of love-making is very subtle. Mr. Leith will not squat down on that chair and talk humanity at me, and I shall not blush and wallow in womanliness. We shall have a cup of tea, and converse about literature, and the last new play, criticism, pictures, and parties. And then, just as he is

going, he will launch his little boat of a proposal on the stream of conversation, and let it float toward me quite carelessly.

Miss E.—And you?

Mrs. D.—I shall allow it to come to anchor.

Miss E.—Then you love him?

Mrs. D. (getting up from her chair and standing by the fire with her face partially concealed)—I want him to launch his boat.

Miss E. (watching her)—It seems to me that modern love is a melancholy sort of thing, a pilgrim without a staff and cockled hat, a festival with no holly and snap-dragon, no geniality and good fellowship. I am a spinster, Maud; but, as you know, I am one because I

reverence an old affection, and keep it in my heart. Long ago, when I was loved, it was in very different fashion.

Mrs. D.—Yet Andrew Leith loves me and I him, only it is in the new way.

Miss E.—There's no new way to love. When I leave you together you will do as all the lovers have done from time immemorial, show each other your real selves. Only you like to keep on the mask of modernity even with me, your old friend. I'm forty-two, alas!

Mrs. D.—No, it is not a pose. Love has changed. And to prove that what I say is true, I will do this: I will allow you to stay in this room, concealed, all the time Andrew is here.

Miss E.—But it would not be fair to him.

Mrs. D.—Perfectly. He will do and say nothing that is not restrained, light, cultured, and artistic. You will assist at a scene from Henry James, not at one from, shall we say, Rhoda Broughton. He will imply his proposal. I shall imply my acceptance. The announcement in the *Morning Post* will give the definite touch that we do not care to supply. *C'est tout.*

Miss E.—You make my venerable blood run cold.

Mrs. D.—You will stay? I will hide you behind this portière. It is hopelessly conventional to hide behind a portière, but it is convenient.

Miss E.—It is generally convenient to be conventional. But suppose you are mistaken in Mr. Leith? If he should

become ardent I should feel most uncomfortable.

Mrs. D.—So should I. But there is no chance of that. He is often witty, but never ardent.

Miss E. (half humorously, half sadly)—And my old lover was always ardent, but never witty. (They hear a ring at the door-bell.)

Mrs. D.—There he is. Come to your portière.

Miss E.—I really cannot.

Mrs. D.—Yes, I want to convince you that there is a new love, and that it is much neater and more highly finished than the old.

Miss E. (holding up her hands in horror)—Neater and more highly finished love!

Mrs. D.—Yes, yes. Come along quickly!

Miss E.—But if his new love degenerates into the old?

Mrs. D.—It will not. We advance in the nineteenth century. We do not retrograde.

Miss E. (vanishing behind the portière)—I am afraid I am retrograding.

SCENE II.

Same as before. Footman shows in Andrew Leith.

Mrs. D. (standing)—How do you do? I have been reading “*Pêcheur d’Islande*.” I always read a page or two of it on gray days. It makes a harmony of color. One’s weather, one’s mood, one’s literature, should all

be *en suite*, shouldn't they? I once saw a woman reading "Pickwick" at Monte Carlo. I have never been able to endure her since; one might as well wear white shoes with a black dress.

A. L. (laying down his hat slowly)
—Or a round hat with a frock coat.

(They sit down by the tea-table.)

A. L.—Yes, people ought to be more careful. A habit of omnivorous reading makes men and women perpetually out of the scene. I am very fond of Dickens when I am at Margate.

Mrs. D.—And when are you there?

A. L.—Never. Thank you, no milk. I prefer a squeeze of lemon.

Mrs. D.—I think I must go to Margate just once.

A. L.—See Margate and die! I have

seen so many places without dying. I suppose Naples and Margate must be added to the list before I can hope to have earned the final *coup de grace*.

Mrs. D.—Do have some muffin. You speak as if you wanted to die.

A. L. (aside)—If she only knew how old-fashioned and nervous I feel, how she would despise me! (Aloud) I never think about death. There are so many other things to think about: "The Dolly Dialogues," for instance, and who will manage to avoid being the next Laureate, and why people think they are daring if they go to a music hall.

Mrs. D.—Yes, life is full of interest.

A. L.—And of music halls. I sometimes feel inclined to avoid both.

Mrs. D.—From laziness?

A. L.—Suppose I said from cowardice?

Mrs. D.—I should not believe you.

A. L.—It is always difficult to believe the truth. ✕ That is why no one believes in anything. We are so surrounded by a crowd of truths that we can scarcely move, or fetch enough breath to utter our painful and eternal parrot cry, "Life is full of shams."

Mrs. D. (aside)—This is very unlike his usual cynicism. (Aloud) Yet realities seem few and far between. We are very like crying shadows.

A. L.—Shadows that seem to have voices, because there is some great ventriloquist somewhere. I wish the voices varied a little more, though. They all



"GOOD-BY. MAY I TELL OUR SECRET TO—THE
'MORNING POST'?" *Page 73.*

say the same thing. The only thing that is never monotonous is silence.

Mrs. D. (laughing)—Then why do you come here and talk to me?

A. L.—Because I enjoy feeling that if we sat in silence we could still be friends. We speak because we need not. Such conversation is delightful. Most people talk, as the birds are said to sing, because they must. We talk because we can. There is the difference.

Mrs. D.—It is very difficult to be silent.

A. L.—So difficult that a clergyman once talked to me in church.

Mrs. D.—What did he say?

A. L.—He said, "I think it extremely wrong to talk in church."

Mrs. D.—The story sums up the virtue of most of us.

A. L.—And the vice of all of us. We all talk in church, in order to tell other people that it is wrong.

Mrs. D.—When we go there.

A. L.—Even when we stay away. We do everything in the spirit that we do not do in the flesh. Please, one cup more.

Mrs. D.—Yes, it is pleasant doing things in the spirit. (I hope that tea is not too strong.) There is less reaction afterward.

A. L.—And more refinement beforehand. (Aside) How long is this sort of thing to go on? If only I could read just the position.

Mrs. D. (aside)—I wonder what Catherine thinks of the new love.

Miss E. (behind the portière)—This may be new, but it is not love.

A. L.—I think that refinement and reticence are the greatest of the virtues.

Mrs. D.—So do I.

A. L.—But I wonder if they can become too much of a habit, and so monotonous? I believe everything ought to be subject to lapses, if it is to preserve its interest. Even a person who is always in good health may become a bore for that very reason. A touch of *malaise* would reinstate him in our good graces. Don't you think so?

Mrs. D.—It depends rather on the sort of *malaise*, I think.

A. L.—There might come a time when one would welcome even a fit, or

a momentary failure of the heart's action. (He glances at her watchfully.)

Mrs. D. (doubtfully)—Perhaps; although failure of the heart's action seems common enough in modern life.

A. L.—You agree?

Mrs. D.—I see what you mean.

A. L.—And so it might be with a reticent person or persons—say a reticent man and woman.

Miss E. (behind the portière)—If he retrogrades, what am I to do?

Mrs. D.—But if anything is perfectly well-bred, the reverse must be perfectly ill-bred.

A. L.—But are there not moments when virtues become vices, and vices virtues? Black is white very often, although politicians say so, and two and

two do occasionally make five despite the blunder of arithmeticians. Surely, surely it is so.

Mrs. D.—I don't know if I should like a refined and reticent man during his lapse.

A. L.—Would you not enjoy the sense of contrast?

Mrs. D.—Possibly, if it were not too violent.

A. L.—Might not its very violence be its charm?

Mrs D.—The lapse would have to be very short, and—very well timed. (Glances uneasily toward portière.)

A. L. (putting down his teacup)—There I agree with you. The man who knows how to choose his time knows how to win his heaven.

Mrs. D.—Are you good at choosing the times for your—lapses?

A. L.—Perhaps I never have any.

Mrs. D.—Probably I have never seen one. I only fancied that you formulated the doctrine of lapses because—because——

A. L.—I was going in for one myself. What from?

Mrs. D.—How should I know?

A. L.—Would you care to see the—er—healthy man in a fit?

Mrs. D.—I don't know. It sounds rather alarming. (Aside) I wish I had let Catherine go, then I think I should have enjoyed being alarmed, but now——

A. L. (aside)—No, she would be appalled. We are both so accustomed

to being inhuman that we had better remain inhuman to the end. (Aloud) I suppose you would run for the doctor, and the fit would end in the disaster of being laid out on the floor and drenched with cold water?

Mrs. D.—Cold water is very reviving.

A. L.—And very damping. But I believe you are right, Mrs. Delane. Lapses should be avoided rigorously. We should choose our plane of feeling and of emotion deliberately, and move steadfastly along it.

Mrs. D. (aside)—I do wish Catherine was not behind the curtain. He is hurt. (Aloud) I suppose it is better.

A. L.—These lapses always mean displays of feeling, the undressing of the mind in public, which is so indecent

and revolting. Some day, no doubt, the County Council will take our minds in hand as well as our sewers, and we shall be prevented by law from losing our tempers and our—hearts.

Mrs. D.—Such losses do occasion a good deal of confusion, don't they? If one person loses a thing, at least five and twenty begin to try to find it. One's losses are made in solitude, one's discoveries in a crowd, envious and disappointed.

A. L.—That's rather true. I should like to be original.

Mrs. D.—How?

A. L.—I should like to try to find something in solitude.

(Draws his chair a little closer to hers.)

Mrs. D. (aside)—Solitude! A solitude *à trois!* What a fool I have been! (Aloud) But then you would have no one to triumph over. And that would take the edge off your discovery.

A. L.—I don't know. There are discoveries that are so beautiful in themselves that to be alone with them might be perfect happiness.

Mrs. D.—Do you think so? Columbus discovered America, but would he have cared about it if his crew had not been round him to share the supreme moment?

A. L.—Perhaps there ought to be just one person.

Mrs. D. (aside towards the portière)—Certainly, there ought not to be two! (Aloud) You agree with me?

A. L.—Generally.

Mrs. D.—In this, I mean?

A. L.—I don't like the idea of an entire crew. One lookout boy would have been enough. We do things for ourselves, and for one other, perhaps; seldom for the whole world.

Mrs. D. (aside)—Catherine is worse than the whole world!

A. L.—We exist for the world, perhaps, but we live for ourselves, and that one other.

(He pauses. She is silent.)

A. L.—Just as we talk for those whom we do not care about, and are silent for those whom we do.

Mrs. D. (hurriedly)—I don't know that I am.

A. L.—No? (He stretches out his

hand and takes hers.) You know what I came here to say to-day?

Mrs. D.—I can guess.

A. L.—You have taught me how to say it or how to consider it said. I had some idea, as I came down Jack Street—and Jack Street is very long—of saying it very differently. But you are right.

Mrs. D.—Thank you.

A. L.—I might have become too definite. I might have had a lapse from the usual into the unusual.

Mrs. D.—It would have been a pity.

A. L. (almost wistfully)—Somehow I seemed to need it. Well (bends and kisses her hand), good-by. May I tell our secret to—the *Morning Post*?

Mrs. D.—Yes.

(He goes to the door, opens it, hesitates, goes out. Mrs. Delane stands with her hands clasped tightly together. There are tears in her eyes. Miss Endsleigh emerges from behind the portière.)

Miss E.—So that is the new love, Maud? Well, it is odd. I don't dislike it, but——

(The door opens again, and Andrew Leith calls "Maud!" Mrs. Delane starts forward impulsively, and disappears through the door. As it closes there is the sound of a kiss.)

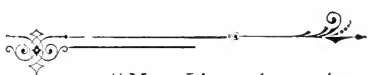
Miss E. (sitting centre)—But I like the old love best, after all. That lapse was worth a thousand epigrams.

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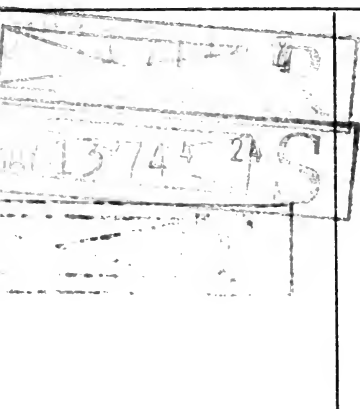
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